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BRIEF TO
THE SECONDARY EDUCATION REVIEW PROJECT

Prepared By:

Ontario Status of Women Council
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BRIEF TO THE SECONDARY EDUCATION REVIEW PROJECT

The Ontario Status of Women Council was established in September 1973 to advise the government of Ontario on matters pertaining to women's status.

This brief will address the topic of secondary education with particular reference to the special needs of young women in Ontario schools.

INTRODUCTION

It is well documented that the role of women in our society has undergone dramatic change in recent years. Women form an increasingly large segment of the labour force - 52% of Ontario women are currently employed, 60% of women will work outside the home for 30 years or more, and 90% of all women will enter the paid labour force at sometime in their adult lives. Despite the fact that workforce participation is a future reality for virtually all of today's secondary school students, young women do not prepare for careers, but continue to see their futures in marriage and childraising. At a recent guidance conference in Halifax, counsellors confirmed that "in spite of the economic situation, the growing number of broken marriages, the visibly changing role of women in this world, it's the same old thing. Young girls want to get married and be taken care of for the rest of their lives."

The Ontario Status of Women Council believes that our schools must act to ensure that young women are prepared for the realities of adult life. We urge a reshaping of secondary school curriculum to eliminate sex-stereotyping and reflect that reality of women's status. We recommend strong initiatives in guidance and counselling, as well as affirmative action in hiring and promotion of women teachers and administrators.

MAJOR CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Curriculum

Major concerns about secondary school curriculum centre on sex stereotyping in courses of study and curriculum materials; the widespread lack of knowledge among students about women's status in society; and the general failure in our schools to relate the demands of the workforce to school programs.

An Ontario Ministry of Education report entitled Sex-Role Stereotyping: Incidence and Implications for Guidance and Counselling (1980) documents that girls make course selections "based more on sex-stereotyping than on reason" and seriously limit their future career options. 1 The majority continue to select traditional areas of study e.g. business and secretarial courses, which tend to lead to low paying, low skill, crowded, "female" occupations. Few

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female earning power, female unemployment, pensions, women in Canadian unions, etc. Family studies courses should include units of study on such topics as family planning, conflict management, stress reduction techniques, and wife assault.

2. In view of the fact that knowledge of women's employment status relates positively to women's career commitment, consideration should be given to establishing a career credit course to deal with such topics as women's economic status, career planning for women, occupational information, etc.
3. Women's studies should be offered in all secondary schools.
4. Textbooks should be carefully screened for bias and replaced with non-sexist material. In cases where costs prohibit replacement, teachers should raise the issue of sex-stereotyping and discuss the bias in the views presented.

Women writers must be well represented in literature courses.

The language in the curriculum should be carefully examined to ensure that it is not sexist and does not connote 'male only' e.g. Man, Science and Technology.

5. A major thrust in the curriculum should be increased opportunities for students to gain contact with the world of work. We commend the Linkage program because it provides the opportunity for on-the-job experience.
6. Women's and men's physical education should be co-educational with emphasis on fitness for all students. Costly and competitive team sports which allow limited participation, particularly for women students, have no place in the physical education curriculum and should be funded in other ways - perhaps through the community resources.

B. Guidance

Guidance and counselling can play a vital role in breaking down stereotypes and encouraging girls to plan for the future.

However, it seems that at present guidance programs are not meeting the special needs of female students. Girls horizons are severely limited by lack of knowledge about their options which is not surprising given the absence of role models in many fields and the narrow range of occupations

girls are encouraged to consider. More than half the girls in the Glaze study said they did not have enough information about the occupations available to them to make a well informed career choice.⁴ In general, female students perceive that counsellors routinely support their traditional career choices. The few students who do enter non-traditional areas do not perceive that they have the support of guidance personnel.⁵ The Status of Women Council is concerned that information about non-traditional career options is not reaching female students and that traditional career choices are not questioned by teachers and guidance personnel.

The fact that there are relatively few guidance counsellors - approximately 1 for every 500 students in Ontario, suggests that traditional one-to-one counselling methods cannot possibly meet the special needs of female students for career information and direction.

Recommendations

7. Sensitivity to the special needs of female students should be a pre-requisite for all guidance counsellors. Teacher training and up-grading courses should be offered to help meet this goal.
8. Counsellors and teachers should intensify efforts to ensure that girls with ability keep their options open for as long as possible so they can choose from the widest range of career possibilities. Girls should be actively encouraged to explore non-traditional fields, particularly mathematics, sciences, technical and trades areas. In the case of technical subjects, counselling must begin earlier - at the grade 8 level, when students first select options.

Where possible all students should receive basic grounding in mathematics, sciences and languages.

9. Increased emphasis must be placed on group counselling to reach as many girls as possible and inform them about career choices. Special efforts should be made to recruit women speakers e.g. from the women's bureau; members of different occupational groups to serve as role models, etc.
10. Since parents expectations are a large factor in students' career decisions, increased efforts must be made to involve and inform parents. Information about career alternatives could be sent home for parents and students to discuss together. Parent education evenings could be organized.

4. Ibid Page VI

5. Sex-Role Stereotyping, 1980. Page 19

C. Affirmative Action for Teachers

A Ministry of Education memorandum dated April 25, 1980, outlines the results of a recent survey of male/female employment patterns in Ontario schools. Among its findings: women comprise 72% of classroom teachers at the elementary level and hold 12% of the principalships. At the secondary level, 1 in 3 teachers is a woman, but fewer than 3% are principals. These findings illustrate that female students are deprived of role models in senior positions. As well, there is an acknowledged need for female teachers to serve as role models for girls in many subject areas at the secondary level, particularly in technical and trades subjects.

The University of Winnipeg provides a Canadian example of measures which can be taken to hire and promote women. New regulations require hiring committees to have male and female representation and to use preferential hiring for women, all other factors being equal, to bring up the ratio of women faculty to match the ratio of students.

Recommendations

11. Affirmative action should be implemented at the school board level to encourage the hiring and promotion of female staff at all levels and in subject areas where there are few role models for girls.
12. Each Board of Education should have a Status of Women Committee and a specially designated staff person to deal with curriculum and personnel matters related to female students and teachers.

2. Alternative Action for Teachers

A Ministry of Education memorandum dated April 12, 1982 outlines the results of a recent survey of male/female employment patterns in Ontario schools. There are findings: women comprise 75% of classroom teachers at the elementary level and 60% of the principalship. At the secondary level, 1 in 3 teachers is a woman, but lower than 10 are principals. These findings illustrate that female students are deprived of role models in senior positions. As well, there is an acknowledged need for female teachers to serve as role models for girls in many subject areas at the secondary level, particularly in technical and trades subjects.

The University of Windsor provides a Canadian example of measures which can be taken to hire and promote women. New regulations require hiring committees to have male and female representation and to use preferential hiring for women, all other factors being equal, to bring up the ratio of women faculty to match the ratio of students.

Recommendations

11. Alternative action should be implemented at the school board level to encourage the hiring and promotion of female staff at all levels and in subject areas where there are few role models for girls.
12. Each Board of Education should have a Status of Women Committee and a specially designated staff person to deal with curriculum and personnel matters related to female students and teachers.